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NSC BRIEFING

9 March 1955

THE QUESTION OF THE ABDICATED  
CAMBODIAN KING

- I. Big questions on Cambodian king's abdication are: Why did he do it? What will he do next?
- A. Immediate reason was growing criticism of king's apparent effort turn back march of democracy in Cambodia.
  - B. King deeply convinced he has public pulse, which, acting through him, constitutes sort of democracy.
  - C. King also ultrasensitive to criticism and given to impulsive acts.
  - D. He has keen sense of showmanship and is capable of grasping opportune moment for execution of carefully evolved plan.
  - E. Resentment over British expression of concern over proposed constitutional reforms was immediate cause of--or pretext for--abdication.
  - F. Deeper motivation is probably king's desire to confound critics by proving to them--and to himself--that he does not need throne in order to be political heavyweight.

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1. Since political bug bit him two years ago, king has acquired talent and zest for hurly-burly of politics.
2. Moreover, king has messianic bent; may compare himself to Gautama Buddha who put aside princely inheritance for sake of cause.
3. King's "cause" would be defense of people's interests against venal party politicians.

II. Ex-king obviously still regards himself as ultimate authority in Cambodia.

- A. At military graduation on 5 March, his parents, the present king and queen, were on hand but ex-king was also and obviously in complete charge.
- B. He told Ambassador McClintock "he had arranged" with palace that negotiations for American aid be expedited.
- C. McClintock foresees him continuing in role of a "shogun."

III. He has retained wide freedom of action in charting his future course.

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- A. He will be free, like any loyal subject, to build a political organization to combat his arch-enemy Son Ngoc Thanh.
- B. At the same time, he can if he chooses remain king in all but name, ruling through his parents.
- C. Third possibility is to have Regency Council restore crown to him, perhaps as result of popular demand which his supporters could easily arrange.